

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

PC-01 OMB-01 /061 W

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R 201542Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7706

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, VE

SUBJECT: ELECTION OF NEW OFFICERS OF THE VENEZUELAN CONGRESS

1. WHEN THE VENEZUELAN CONGRESS RECONVENES ON MARCH 3 IT WILL ELECT OFFICERS FOR ITS 1975 SESSION. THE CURRENT PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, (WHO IS ALSO PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS) AD SENATOR GONZALO BARRIOS, IS CERTAIN OF REELECTION. A STRUGGLE HAS DEVELOPED, HOWEVER, OVER THE PRESIDENCY OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, CURRENTLY OCCUPIED BY THE INDEPENDENT DEPUTY (ELECTED ON THE COPEI SLATE) GONZALO RAMIREZ CUBILLAN.

2. ACCORDING TO AGREEMENT BETWEEN AD (WHICH CONTROLS THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES) AND COPEI (WHICH HAS THE NEXT LARGEST REPRESENTATION IN THAT CHAMBER), AD SUPPORTS THE COPEI NOMINEE OF A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE LOWER HOUSE. LAST YEAR COPEI PRESENTED RAMIREZ AS ITS CANDIDATE, IN THE BELIEF THAT RAMIREZ WOULD WORK WELL WITH THE AD MAJORITY BUT AT THE SAME TIME EFFECTIVELY PUSH THE INTERESTS OF COPEI AS WELL AS THE OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES REPRESENTED IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES.

3. VIRTUALLY PARALYZED BY ITS 1973 ELECTORAL DEFEAT, COPEI MOUNTED ONLY INEFFECTUAL OPPOSITION TO AD IN THE CONGRESS DURING 1974, AND INCREASING COPEI CRITICISM OF RAMIREZ AS A TOOL OF AD HAS BEEN VOICED IN RECENT MONTHS. CONSEQUENTLY, ON FEB. 18, COPEI DECIDED

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TO DUMP RAMIREZ, WHO BADLY WANTED REELECTION AS DEPUTIES' PRESIDENT

AND HAS AD SUPPORT, AND PUT FORWARD ONE OF ITS OWN FOR THE JOB. AFTER SOME INFIGHTING BY VARIOUS COPEI ASPIRANTS, COPEI SELECTED COPEI DEPUTY FROM ZULIA OSWALDO ALVAREZ PAZ, A YOUNG LAWYER IDENTIFIED WITH THE PARTY'S LEFT WING. ALVAREZ PAZ IS ALSO A NEPHEW OF MEP LEADER JESUS ANGEL PAZ GALARRAGA AND APPARENTLY HAS THE SUPPORT OF MOST OF THE OTHER OPPOSITION DEPUTIES.

4. ON FEB. 19 AD AGREED TO ACCEPT ALVAREZ PAZ AS THE COPEI CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE DEPUTIES. AD OBVIOUSLY REGARDS WITH MIS-GIVINGS ALVAREZ PAZ AS LEADER OF THE LOWER HOUSE, BUT PREFERENCES TO GO ALONG WITH HIS SELECTION RATHER THAN RISK A FIGHT WITH COPEI AND PROBABLY THE OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES ON THE EVE OF THE BEGINNING OF THE 1975 ORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS, WHICH MUST CONSIDER MUCH IMPORTANT LEGISLATION, NOTABLY THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY. ALVAREZ PAZ' ELECTION AS THE NEW DEPUTIES' PRESIDENT THEREFORE SEEMS ASSURED.

5. COMMENT: ALVAREZ PAZ' CANDIDACY IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE IT PRESAGES AN END TO COPEI INACTIVITY IN THE CONGRESS AND A RETURN TO MUCH MORE MILITANT LEGISLATIVE PARTISANSHIP. PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ' LONG HONEYMOON WITH THE VENEZUELAN CONGRESS HAS THUS DRAWN TO AN END.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION CANDIDATES, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE, LOWER HOUSE, LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975CARACA01878
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750061-0399
From: CARACAS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750229/aaaaazjq.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 SEP 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <23 SEP 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ELECTION OF NEW OFFICERS OF THE VENEZUELAN CONGRESS
TAGS: PINT, VE, (RAMIREZ CUBILLAN, GONZALO), (GONZALO BARRIOS), (ALVAREZ PAZ)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006